



Congressman

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Opening Statement of Chairman McHugh Military Personnel Subcommittee Hearing on Military Voting

Today the Subcommittee turns its attention to an issue of great importance to the men and women serving in uniform-their right to vote.

The narrow margin of victory during the Presidential election of 2000 catapulted military voters into the headlines. As the nation watched the counting of the final ballots in Florida, it became apparent that many of those ballots belonged to 176,000 active duty military members who were registered to vote in Florida.

The importance of the absentee vote in a close election was not lost on military members and their families around the world. Members of Congress soon received numerous complaints from service members who believed that they were denied the proper opportunity to vote. The complaints included:

- Lack of responsiveness from state election officials.
- Poor mail delivery and pickup.
- Inability to get information and registration/voting materials.

Many of those military voters were angry. They felt they had been disenfranchised without good reason and cheated out of their vote.

This is not a new problem. In 1952, President Truman, based on military voting issues raised by servicemen fighting in Korea, urged the Congress to "not shrink from accepting its responsibility and exercising its constitutional powers to give soldiers the right to vote where the states fail to do so."

I believe that we must do better to protect the voting rights of our military members. It is clear from the legislation that has been introduced in this Congress that a number of members share that view, to include a number of members of this Subcommittee.

From a practical standpoint, much of the existing law that establishes the voting rights of military personnel falls outside the jurisdiction of the Committee on Armed Services, and this subcommittee. We, however, do have jurisdiction over the DOD Voter Assistance Program, and I am fully committed to ensure that we exercise aggressive oversight of that program.

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Furthermore, as Chairman Ney of the House Administration Committee and other committee chairman move to examine and possibly amend existing law to facilitate military voting, this subcommittee will work to assist that effort. The goal must be to make certain that there are no barriers to military voting within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Armed Services.

The objective today is to gain a better understanding about what needs to be done to enhance the opportunity for military members to exercise their right to vote.

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